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ABSTRACT

This study concerns the influence of native language instruction in grades one through six on bilingual Hispanics' high school achievement. A nationally representative sample of 58,000 high school sophomores and seniors (the High School and Beyond data set) was used as the data source. Path analytic techniques were used to determine the magnitude of the effect of early native language instruction, while controlling for other relevant influences which included ethnic origin, mother's years in the United States, family background, intellectual ability, Hispanicity, English proficiency, and extent of native language instruction. Results suggest that the extent of native language instruction a bilingual Hispanic student receives has a negative influence on his or her later achievement. Other direct influences were ability, English proficiency, family background, mother's years in the United States (negative) and Hispanicity (negative). Results were consistent across different measures of extent of native language instruction. These preliminary and tentative results suggest that a transitional approach to bilingual education may be more fruitful than a maintenance approach. (CG)

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Does Bilingual Education Improve Hispanics' Achievement? A Large-Sample Path Analysis

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Running head: BILINGUAL INSTRUCTION

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Does Bilingual Education Improve Hispanics' Achievement? A Large-Sample Path Analysis

There is considerable current debate concerning the role of bilingual education in U.S. public schools. While most would agree that some sort of bilingual, or native language, instruction is needed for those with limited english proficiency, there is a great deal of disagreement concerning the necessary extent of this instruction. Those who espouse a transitional approach feel that the goal of native language instruction should be to make the transition to English and into regular classes. At the other end of the continuum are those who prefer a maintenance approach and who believe much more instruction should be in the native language, with a secondary goal of maintaining that language.

The purpose of the present study was to determine the influence of native language instruction in grades one through six on bilingual Hispanics' high school achievement. The High School and Beyond data set (HSB), a nationally representative sample of 58,000 U.S. high school sophomores and seniors (which includes a large subsample of Hispanics), was used as the source of the data. From this larger data set were selected all Hispanic bilingual seniors who had achievement test scores and who had answered questionaire items pertaining to previous native language instruction (N=1,890). Path analytic techniques were used to determine the magnitude of the effect of early native

language instruction (amount of instruction in various subject matter areas conducted in Spanish in grades one through six) on high school achievement, while controlling for other relevant influences. A path model incorporating influences (controls) from ethnic origin (Cuban vs. other), Mother's years in the U.S., Family Background, Intellectual Ability, Hispanicity (mother tongue, Spanish use, and Spanish proficiency), English Proficiency, and Extent of Native Language Instruction on High School Achievement was constructed. Multiple regression and partial correlational techniques were used to solve for the paths.

Insert Figure 1 about here

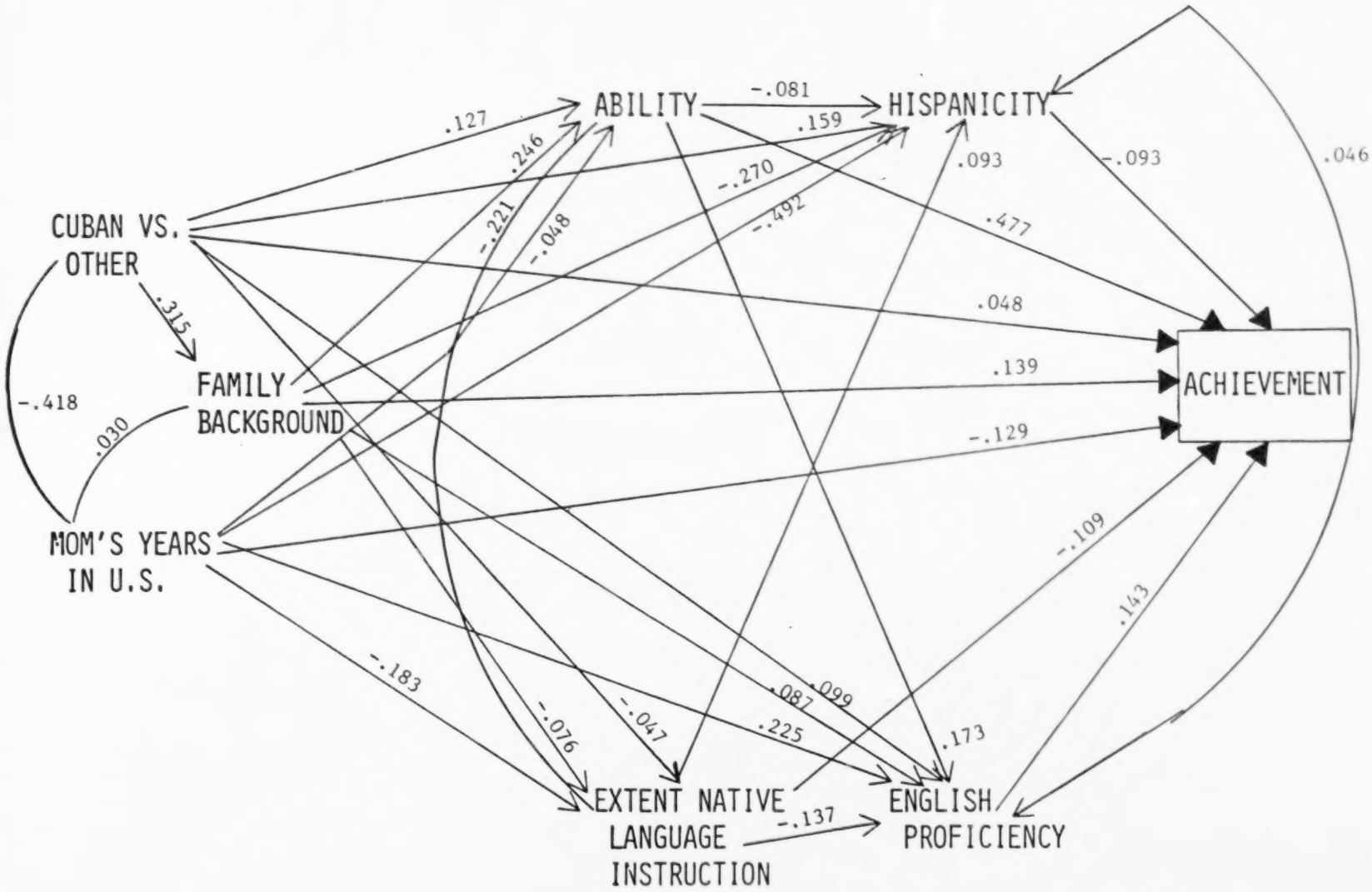
Results, shown in Figure 1, suggest that the extent of native language instruction (Spanish) a bilingual Hispanic student receives in grades one through six has a negative influence on his or her later achievement. Other meaningful direct influences (in order of magnitude) included: Ability, English Proficiency, Family Background, Mother's years in U.S. (negative), and Hispanicity (negative). Furthermore, results were consistent across different measures of extent of native language instruction.

These results, while preliminary and tentative, suggest that a transitional approach to bilingual instruction may be more

fruitful than a maintenance approach. It also appears that English language acquisition should be a major priority in Hispanics' bilingual education.

Figure Caption

Figure 1. Effects of Ethnic Origin, Mother's Years in the U.S., Family Background, Intellectual Ability, Extent of Native Language Instruction in Grades One Through Six, Hispanicity, and English Proficiency on Hispanic Seniors' Achievement. All paths are standardized coefficients, where ± 1.00 would represent complete influence.



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